

THE DRAMA.

THE coming of the KEMBLEs, and the dramatic festival in honor of JOHN HOWARD PAYNE, gave an era to Theatricals during the autumn, such as our boards have rarely if ever boasted before. The brilliant tribute to Mr. Payne was rendered towards the end of November, and on the evening of

December 1st—The second engagement of the KEMBLEs closed, to one of the most brilliant and overflowing houses that was ever congregated within the walls of the Park Theatre. The play of the Hunchback constituted the chief attraction. Miss KEMBLE as Julia in no degree lessened those powerful impressions which her personation of this beautiful though difficult character has created; while her father, as Sir Thomas Clifford, though the character is by no means fitted to display the abilities of this excellent actor, succeeded, as he generally does, in giving to his part an interest which failed not to insure the admiration of his audience. We have a few words to say respecting "The Hunchback." This play has proved a great favorite with the public; and while no drama of modern times has been so completely successful upon the stage, it has been thought worthy of being compared, as a reading play, with the productions of many of the old dramatists. Indeed, though the spirit in which the characters are drawn partakes in many instances, and necessarily, of the present age, we are not the less disposed to render Mr. Knowles the praise of having successfully followed in the steps of these venerable fathers of the English stage, and proved himself an able disciple of the school of Fletcher, Webster and Ford.

December 8th. On this evening Mr. and Mrs. RAE made their first appearance on the stage of the Park Theatre. The modest and unpretending manner in which these performers have come before the public, has quite prepossessed us in their favor. The play was Morton's comedy of "A Cure for the Heart-Ache;" and though the parts of Jesse Oatland and Young Rapid are not of sufficient scope to enable us to judge accurately of the merits of performers seen for the first time, we were much pleased with the manner in which these debutants acquitted themselves. Indeed, these performers will constitute a most valuable acquisition to the Stock company of the Park, which now possesses sufficient strength for the representation of our best comedies.

We cannot suffer this occasion to pass, without saying a few words respecting Mr. WILKINSON, who made his first appearance

in the early part of the season, and who is now one of the regular company at the Park. Mr. Wilkinson has rapidly established himself in the favor of our play-going public; and there is no actor on the American boards by whom he is surpassed in a certain line of characters. His manner is always chaste; and his humor is of an unobtrusive and quiet nature, which pleases equally with the boisterous mirth of others. In Dogberry, though perhaps not as successful as Barnes in convulsing the house with laughter, he gives full effect to the ludicrous dignity with which Shakspeare has invested this prince of watchmen; and though he possesses not that remarkable versatility of talent which enables Hilson to draw both tears and smiles from his audience, he yet has those qualities which render him well qualified to supply the vacuum created by the retirement of these general favorites.

Dec. 14th. Mr. FORREST concluded a short engagement at the Park, during which he played in the three pieces known as "The Prize Tragedies," elicited by the liberality of this popular actor, viz. *Metamora*, *The Gladiator*, and *Oraloosa*. The first of these pieces, viewed as a *tragedy*, is beneath criticism. It has not suffered from the misnomer, however, but has long held, and probably will continue to hold, possession of the stage, as a most successful melo-drama. The last is a late production from the pen of Dr. Bird, the well-known author of the piece enumerated before it.

Oraloosa, after long preparation, was represented for the first time on Friday evening, Dec. 7, to an overflowing house, anxious to ascertain whether the author had sustained the reputation he reaped in such abundance from "The Gladiator." On reviewing our recollections of *Oraloosa*, we are forced to say that we were much disappointed in this last production of Dr. Bird, which is in every respect far inferior to *The Gladiator*: a play which exhibits some admirable theatrical situations, and with many passages of great power contains others of a softer character, worthy of being compared with some of the sweetest verses of our old poets.

The plot of *Oraloosa* is complex in the extreme, the author having in the formation of it worked up incidents and events, which might with propriety constitute the subjects of three or four dramas. Of its poetical merits we would say but little. In the overweening anxiety which the author has taken to store his play with incident, it seems to have escaped him that a good drama must possess something more than continued bursts of passion, and vigorous and continued action,

to constitute it a legitimate tragedy; and one may therefore look in vain for those poetic beauties in *Oraloosa*, which have contributed not a little to make *The Gladiator* so permanent a favorite.

Dec. 19th.—O'Keefe's comedy of "*Wild Oats*" was performed this evening, in order to introduce a new debutant, Mr. J. Mason, in the character of Rover. So little pains had been taken to trumpet forth the name of this gentleman, that a very thin audience was collected on the occasion; and probably, on the rising of the curtain, no one expected the high enjoyment which was in store for him. That Mr. Mason is an actor of no ordinary rank, appeared fully by his performance. The part was most happily chosen, as it gave him an opportunity of displaying his powers in the delivery of some of the finest passages of our dramatic poetry, and at the same time of showing his merits as a general actor. The various quotations of which the character of Rover is made up, were given with extreme beauty, especially those of a pathetic nature, into which Mr. Mason threw a degree of feeling which was irresistibly touching; as, for instance, in that fine scene where Jim rushes forward to defend his father, Rover quotes some lines applicable to the situation, and then, his own situation forcing itself upon him, he mournfully utters—"I never knew a father's protection—never had a father to protect!"—The wooing of Lady Amaranth was well done. Mr. Mason's gentlemanlike and modest address especially shine in scenes of tenderness; his voice, though not possessed of much strength, is so well modulated, and its flexibility so well managed, that any deficiency in power is made up by the skill with which it is used. His face is capable of much expression, and his figure well formed. His performance of Rover throughout was lively and spirited. He filled up the character to our entire satisfaction, and to that of a most enthusiastic auditory, in whose favor he completely established himself. Mr. Mason will become, we doubt not, a general favorite among us. He will be a most valuable and important auxiliary to the company, in a department, too, in which there has for a long time been a most glaring deficiency.

In English Opera there has been but little done at the Park until within a short time, there having been so many other sources of attraction and profit. We note, however, that Miss HUGHES is now playing, but we are sorry to say to houses by no means crowded. This may easily be accounted for. The Italian *troupe* is now regarded as the legitimate operatic company; and the great body of our amateurs is to be seen on opera nights within the walls of the Richmond Hill. As the termination of the Italian company's engagement has now arrived, English opera will again, we trust, delight us, as in former times it was wont. Miss Hughes is a charming songstress; and we are sure that now, when the Italians have left us, the sweetness and richness of her voice, and the inimitable grace with which she warbles forth her notes, will be appreciated, and ensure for our *homely* opera that applause, which until of late it has enjoyed.

Dec. 28.—Since the above was in type, Mr. CHARLES KEAN has commenced a farewell engagement at the Park, prior to his return to London, where he is said to have formed a most flattering engagement at one of the Metropolitan theatres. To do the performances of this excellent tragedian justice, however, we must defer noticing them to our next number.

BOWERY.—At this theatre, since the commencement of the season, theatricals have been well attended to. The manager has catered actively for the taste of the public. Not to mention our native actress, Miss VINCENT, of whom we shall on some future occasion speak more at length, we have observed that BOOTH has lately concluded a most successful engagement at this theatre, in which he performed his most celebrated characters. Mr. B.'s professional merits, in a peculiar range of parts, notwithstanding his varying style of playing them, are so well known and appreciated, that it were superfluous for us to enter into a detailed criticism; though were we disposed to do so, our limits, which are already exceeded, would forbid it.

* * Upon arranging the matter in type, it was found necessary to omit some valuable Statistics and Miscellanies, prepared for this number; but which must now be deferred to the next.

Erratum. Page, 31, for *Monboddoniano* read *Monboddoniana*.